

veterans benefits. Please see that Congress puts some teeth in the new Medicare Preservation Act. Since its inception, the Medicare program has been riddled with fraud.

Mr. Speaker, I want to spend a moment on that. I think it is significant that we in Congress face the fact that there is tremendous amount of fraud in our system of Medicare. We read and see the reports on TV, we see the special reports that many of the news stations have done, and it is appalling. It is appalling that in this Nation there are entrepreneurs in the health care industry that are ripping off our society for hundreds of millions of dollars.

We have to focus on these problems. We have to find ways to find those perpetrators of the crime and take their licenses away, take their opportunities to do business away, lock them in jail like the criminals that they are. It is amazing to me that people can rip off our system for the hundreds of millions of dollars and walk away and say, well, we are going to get fined \$10,000, so my theft of \$100,000 certainly works out as a better fiscal advantage for me.

Mr. Speaker, I get that in letters constantly from my constituents saying to me, MARK, we have a lot of problems.

Let me read this letter from Maria Rooney in Jensen Beach. She opposes the plan but would like to stay on regular Medicare.

Just a few lines to support my choices. I am 75 years of age and I work at a stand-up job every day. It also includes lifting cartons of merchandise. I continue to contribute to Social Security and to Federal income tax.

I feel that Medicare can remain the same if controls be placed on it. Too many are taking advantage of food stamps and welfare making it an impossible situation for the poor elderly who must depend on it.

The veterans fought for our country. Many in impossible situations, locations and living conditions. Many were away from home for years.

Immigration is out of control. At one point in time people were sent back to their countries because of very strict health rules. Now we take them in knowing they are not in the best of health. Is this in the best interest of our country, which is bent on taking help and aid from our own poor and elderly?

Well, Marie, we are very concerned about that. There is not a person on my side of the aisle that is trying to take benefits away from people who have worked their entire life serving in the military or seniors that are entitled to benefits. We are increasing the benefit ratio. We are spending more money. We are going from \$4,800 to \$6,700. We are increasing 40 percent on our Medicare spending but we are targeting illegal immigration.

Mr. Speaker, it is amazing to me how our immigration law have become so lax; how people have been able to take advantage of the system of government, those that have served. I spoke at a veterans day ceremony this weekend, and it is sad to me that people, men and women, have lost their lives in pursuit of freedom in this country and we are telling them, in some cases,

that their service maybe was important but not as important as other things.

Priorities must be established in this budget. Priorities must be established for those who have served our country and served our people, but there are so many things that are wrong with our system. If we close our eyes and say everything is fine and go back to spending, and spend, and spend, and spend, this Nation will not clean up its fiscal house.

I urge my colleagues as we continue the debate on Medicare to stress for more scrutiny on those that would rip off our elderly, those that would rip off our society and waste our tax dollars through fraud and abuse.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that I be allowed to switch my special order with the gentleman for New Jersey, [Mr. PALLONE].

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Ohio?

There was no objection.

REPUBLICANS ARE SECRETIVE ABOUT CONTENTS OF BUDGET RECONCILIATION

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from New Jersey [Mr. PALLONE] is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, I was just listening to the gentleman from Florida talk about Medicare and the budget, and I guess my response, initially, is that I just wish I knew what was in this budget reconciliation, as we call it, and what is coming out of the conference. Because one of the things that outrages me is the whole process that the Republican leadership has used from the very beginning in dealing with Medicare and the budget, and that is that we, as Democrats, do not know what is going on.

Mr. Speaker, they started out by bringing up the bill in the Committee on Commerce, in the Committee on Ways and Means, in some cases without any hearings, in some cases with very few hearings, giving us drafts of the bill either on Medicare, Medicaid, or the other reconciliation items either the night before or sometimes the morning that we were expected to vote on it.

This process continued today. I was really outraged when I went over to the Senate today. Last night those of us who were conferees on the budget, those of us who were supposed to work out the differences between the House and the Senate, were told last night that there was to be a conference at 3 o'clock this afternoon over on the Senate side. When I went over there with my other colleagues from the Committee on Commerce and from other committees we were first of all told there were not going to be any opening state-

ments, that we were not allowed to speak; then we were told we were not allowed to ask questions; and finally, we were not even given a copy of the conference bill that has been mostly worked out in secret by the Republican leadership in the House and the Senate.

So once again, Mr. Speaker, this process continues. The Republican leadership does not want the American people, and certainly not the Democrats in this House, to know what they are doing. They hammer out secret agreements, in the case over the budget, over Medicare and Medicaid, without having any Democrats participate in the process. It certainly is not fair, it is outrageous, and it goes against the very democratic process that this House and this institution are supposed to be all about.

These are important issues. The differences between the House and the Senate bill on Medicare and on Medicaid are significant. For example, in nursing home standards. We know that in the Senate bill they continue the Federal nursing home standards. They do not in the House bill. How do I know what the difference is and what has been worked out in conference? I will probably have to read about it in tomorrow's newspaper.

We also know there was a significant difference with regard to pensions, because in the House version basically corporations are allowed to dip into their employees' pensions to use for various purposes. In the Senate bill they were not allowed that. I read this morning in the Washington Post that the conference has worked out a plan which says that a controversial provision that would allow corporations to withdraw excess money from workers' pension funds to pay for other employees and retirement benefits is apparently in the conference bill.

It is nice I read it in the newspaper, but there is no indication at this point as to what really happened. Certainly not the intricacies of what happened.

I also got a press release today with regard to my home State of New Jersey. Some of my Republican colleagues, in fact half of them on the other side, voted against the Medicare bill and against the Republican budget bill, as did I, because they thought it was unfair to the State and it would hurt senior citizens in the State of New Jersey.

An AP story comes out and says New Jersey office estimates higher Medicaid funds for the States. Apparently, the conference, which I have not seen, includes another \$654 million in additional money beyond the House version in the bill for the State of New Jersey. Of course, they failed to point out that current law would provide \$6 billion more. So, in effect, we have lost about \$5.5 billion because of what came out in the conference report.

Again, Mr. Speaker, it is a constant effort to be secretive about what is going on, to reveal items in press releases or in the newspapers the next